The Potential of International Student Associations (ISAs)

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BACKGROUND

- Shifting trends in international student numbers across national contexts
- ISs as "cash cows" (Bista, 2018; Cantwell, 2015)
- ISs rights are limited by national borders (Marginson, 2012)
- ISs experience inequality and are subject to different standards of educational justice (2013)
- ISs face challenge at three stages: access, post-departure (during their studies), and post-graduation (Khanal and Kaulee, 2019)
- Discrimination against ISs occurs both on campus and off-campus in the U.S. and overseas (Tozini, forthcoming)
- The pandemic and anti-immigration policies have negatively impacted international student wellbeing (Castiello-Gutiérrez & Li, 2020)

SOCIAL CAPITAL + INTERNATIONAL STUDENT NETWORKS
- Social capital can contribute to inequality (Bourdieu, 1986' Lin, 2000)
- Social capital can explain the inequality gap between ISs and DSs
- IS networks are important sources of SC (Moon and Shin, 2019)
- IS associations as sources of social capital and enhance sense of belonging (Ma, 2014) but can have negative effects (Rienties et al., 2013)
- Bonding SC, Bridging SC, Maintained SC

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

According to its members, in what ways can international student associations address issues of discrimination and inequality in U.S. higher education?

1. What issues of discrimination and inequality in the context of international students do association members and leaders raise?
2. Why do students participate in the international student association and its affiliated units?
3. To what extent does the association contribute to forming students' networks?
4. What additional factors may impact the formation of these networks?
5. What contributes and hinders the success of international student associations?

JUSTIFICATIONS

- Increasing educational equality could contribute to protecting the interests of all students, regardless of national origin (Tannock, 2013)
- ACE's International Student Success report recommends that international students access interconnected networks on campus and beyond its borders (Glass et al., 2021a).
- IS associations is an understudied phenomenon
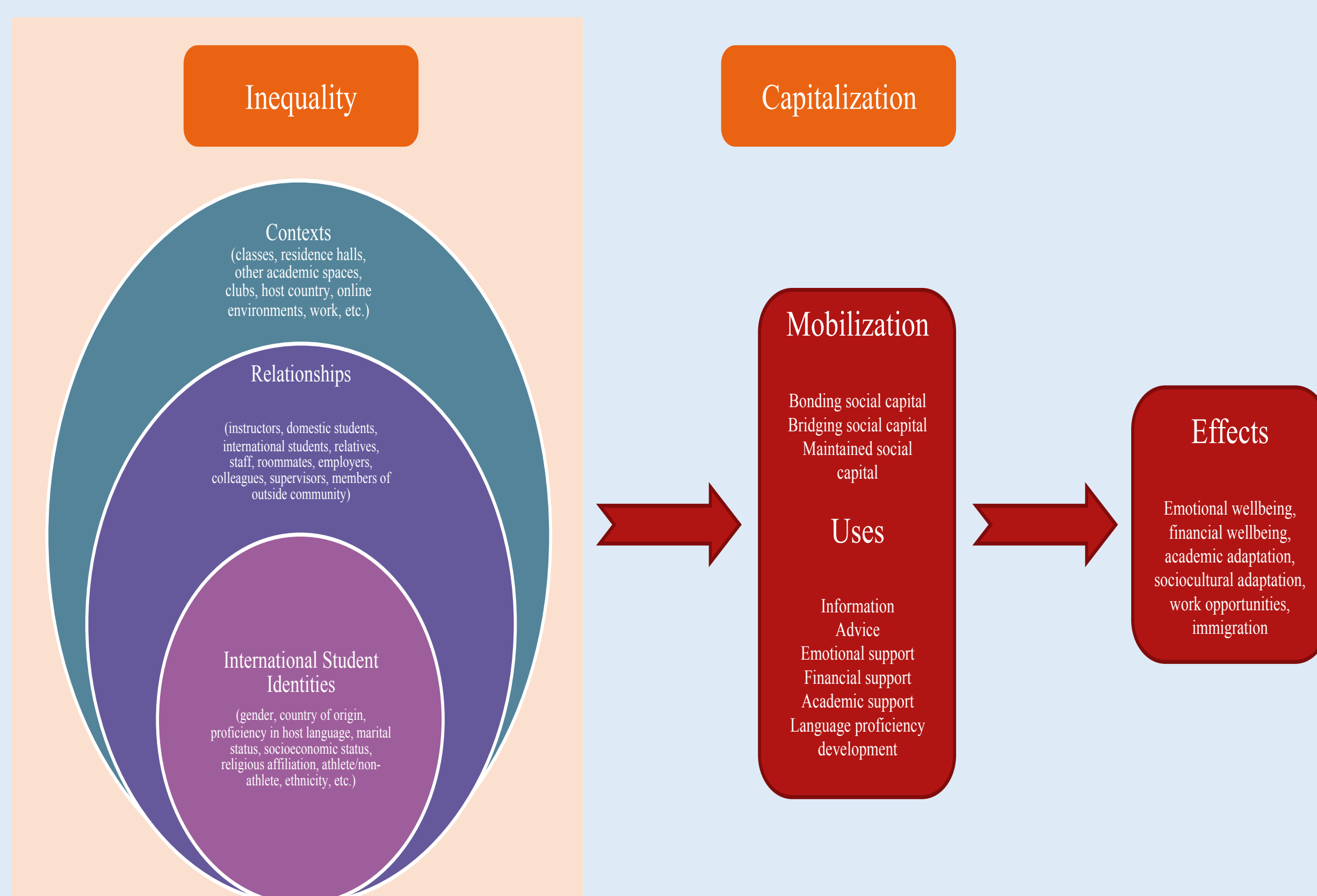
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Network Analysis
- Networks are not fixed entities
- Does not aim to understand the network in its entirety
- Offer a microperspective and insider view
- Networks are linked to individuals' actions (Ahrens, 2018)
- Can help understand migration ties (Scheibelhofer, 2011)
- Can look at how international student ethnicity interacts with other structuring forces such as migration forces, inequality, and discrimination discrimination (Ryan & Dehinden, 2021)
- Bilecen (2018) found that Chinese students' network formation experiences are not limited/solely caused by their ethnicity

Data Collection
- Document Analysis (Institutional documents, websites)
- 19 interviews
    - 7 with administrators at the organizational level
    - 3 with chapter leaders
    - 9 with student members on an F1 visa
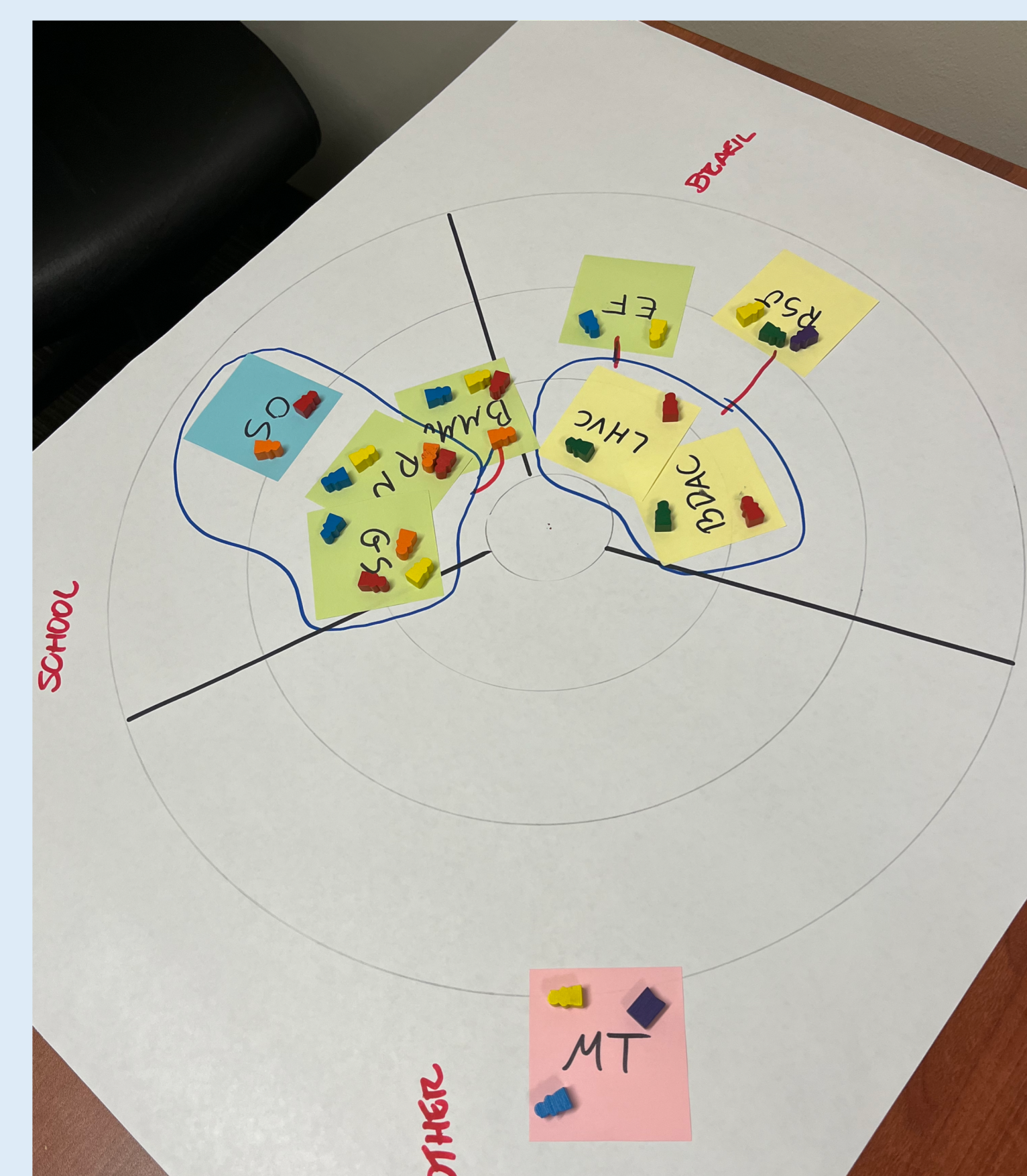- Concentric circles approach

Prompt example
"*From time to time, most people discuss important matters with other people. Looking back over the last six months, who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Please write them on the sticky notes, one person per stick note. Note that the different colors of the sticky notes represent relatives, Brazilians, U.S. Americans, and other nationalities*"
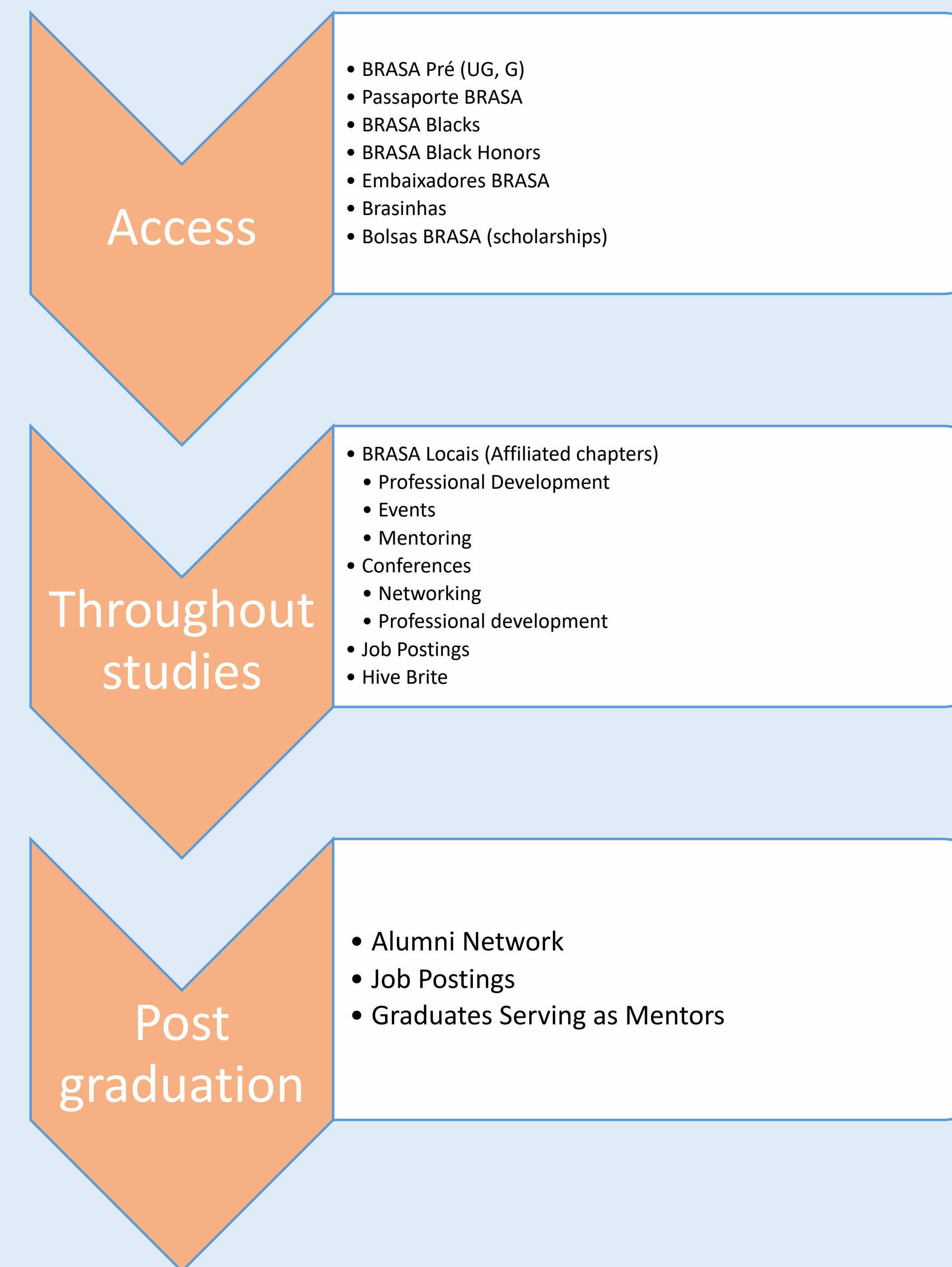
Data Analysis
- Individual analysis of networks (photos)
- Transcript analysis
- Memos (vignettes) network formation and support sources
- Structural coding + Pattern Coding (Dedoose)

About the organization
- Since 2014
- +9,000 members
- + 90 chapters in North America, Europe, and Asia
- 133 board members
- Ambassadors at +600 schools
- +725 mentees

RESULTS

Access
- BRASA Pré (UG, G)
- Passaporte BRASA
- BRASA Blacks
- BRASA Black Honors
- Embaixadores BRASA
- Brasinhas
- Bolsas BRASA (scholarships)

Throughout studies
- BRASA Locais (Affiliated chapters)
    - Professional Development
    - Events
    - Mentoring
- Conferences
    - Networking
    - Professional development
- Job Postings
- Hive Brite

Post graduation
- Alumni Network
- Job Postings
- Graduates Serving as Mentors

Emerging Themes

Discrimination issues raised
- Different cost of attendance
- Racial and ethnic discrimination
- Job and internship restrictions

Reasons for joining the organization
- Connecting with other students – sense of belonging
- Giving back, but better
- Cultural aspects
- Making a difference

Challenges the association faces
- Fast-pace character of the organization
- For students, by students
- Unpaid roles
- Lack of commitment by some
- Lack of diversity

Opportunities
- Growth in Brazilian student numbers
- Active recruitment in Latin America
- Interested students
- Companies interested in hiring Brazilian talent back home and overseas
- Universities' recognition of international student associations

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

ISAs can help attract and retain students at the national (org) and local levels

Nature of the organization (for students, by students) can be a challenge

Can serve as a source of bonding and bridging social capital

Can reduce inequality for ISs in all three stages of the student experience

Recommendations - HEIs
- Foster the creation and autonomy of ISAs
- ISA members as ambassadors of the institution
- Have dedicated staff for programming for ISs, who can partner up with USAs
- Intentional recruitment efforts in partnerships with ISAs for students of all SES groups
- Have ISA leadership engaged in SA boards/committees

Recommendations - governments/policymakers
- Financial investment in ISAs as they can serve as facilitators in the application process and the formation of student and research networks
- Partner with ISAs - ways to navigate crises and expedite bureaucratic processes

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